


**Soldiers** *Online*

# Recruiting in

Story and Photos by SSG John Valceanu



**T**IMES Square is in the heart of New York City. Located in the middle of Manhattan, where Broadway, 7th Avenue and 43rd Street converge, it attracts millions of tourists each year and may well be one of the world's busiest blocks. And located in the heart of Times Square is the nation's oldest joint-service recruiting station.

Established in 1946, the recruiting station stands on an island in the center of Broadway. Traffic rushes by on both sides like an angry, roaring river. The station spent most of its life as a glass-and-metal building that resembled a small diner. It was easily lost amid the block's loud billboards and bright lights.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Times Square neighborhood fell on hard times. Porn theaters proliferated throughout the area, as did "head" shops that sold drug paraphernalia. The streets were populated by drug addicts and dealers. Then, New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani launched his campaign to clean up the city in the mid-1990s, and he focused on Times Square. The shady, seedy elements were driven out, and respectable businesses moved in. Within a few years, Times Square was reborn. Respectable citizens once again felt safe walking the streets in the evening.

But the recruiting station hadn't kept up with the times. While buildings and storefronts were being renovated and redesigned all around, the recruiting station remained a dingy reminder of times that had come and gone.

"The Department of Defense was essentially given the message by the city of New York that it had better do something about the recruiting station or start thinking about moving it elsewhere," said Bruce Zielsdorf, public affairs officer for the Army's New York branch of the Office of the

Chief of Public Affairs. "The station looked out of place in the middle of the new Times Square."

Then the Army Corps of Engineers came to the rescue. The New York branch of the ACOE redesigned the structure, giving it a modern glass-and-neon look that shines as bright as any other building front in Times Square. Indeed, the building does more than just blend in, it actually stands out, winning a host of awards.

In 1998 the American Institute of Architects honored the recruiting station with its Design Award. In 1999 the Art Commission of the City of New York recognized the building with an award for excellence in design. In 2000 the station earned notice for "Design Distinction in Environments" from the Annual Design Review, and it also won the American Architecture Award from the Chicago Athenaeum



**A possible recruit enters the station. While many people open the station's doors each day, a large number of them are looking for directions or are simply curious.**

**Uncle Sam points a finger at passersby from behind one of the Times Square station's glass walls.**



# the Big Apple



Museum of Architecture and Design.

"The station certainly gets attention. We get a lot of people walking in right off the street," said SSG Rae McFarlane, a Times Square recruiter.

Though McFarlane said many of the people who open the recruiting station's doors are just curious about the military, or are tourists who want to ask directions, the building also attracts recruits.

One of them was Deeben Kang, a former Brooklyn resident who was a student at the City University of New York's John Jay College of Criminal Justice when he decided to enlist.

"I had seen the station a couple of times and looked at the posters, and one day I decided to go in and see what kind of opportunities the Army offered," Kang said.

Scoring high on his vocational and language-aptitude tests, he was able to enlist as a counterintelligence specialist. Within a week of walking into the recruiting station in October 1999, he was on his way to Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., for basic training. Having completed that, along with his MOS training at Fort Huachuca, Ariz., Kang was selected to serve in the hometown recruiter program at the Times Square station during the summer of 2000, before heading off to his first duty station, Korea.

"I'm glad I was able to come back to this station. This location is killer," Kang said. "It draws a lot of attention, and it's world famous. Before I ever thought of joining the Army, I used to see this station on MTV all the time."

Kang said that, regardless of how he ended up joining, enlisting in the Army was definitely the right move for him.

"This was a good opportunity to better myself," he said. "I feel that I'm setting a good cornerstone for the rest of my life."

Like Kang, McFarlane is a New York City native who returned to the Big Apple in a recruiting capacity.



**(Above)** The New York recruiting station is situated on the corner where 43rd Street intersects with 7th Avenue and Broadway. It is one of the busiest spots in the Big Apple. **(Top)** The station's award-winning glass and neon design shines as bright at night as anything else in Times Square.

Though he was not recruited from the Times Square station, he said his job is made easier by the station's central location.

"This street is so crowded that all I have to do is walk across the street, and someone will ask me about my uniform or about the Army," McFarlane said. "I make a lot of contacts that way, just by going from one place to another. New York's great that way."

Not only is the station's central location good for business, but the other services' representatives are very helpful and cooperative, McFarlane said.

"We've got a great working relationship. Nobody tries to cut anybody else's throat. If the Air Force has somebody that isn't right for them, for example, but who might work for

us, they pass them along to us. We do the same thing for them. All the services try to help each other while doing their own missions," McFarlane said.

Sometimes, recruiters from all four services will stand outside the booth in their uniforms. That can draw quite a crowd.

"People in New York aren't used to seeing military people. They'll come up and try to see if we're cops or security guards," McFarlane said. "We could spend a long time answering questions about our uniforms. But that is good, because it means we're helping to get people interested in the Army and the other services."

Thus, working in the very heart of the Big Apple, Times Square recruiters may be the military's most visible ambassadors to New York City. □